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SEBASTIAN WESTCOTE, DRAMATIST AND MASTER
OF THE CHILDREN OF PAUL'S

The sixteenth century was full of dramatists who were active and important in their own day, but who have been so illtreated by time that little or none of their work remains, and only the echo of their fame. Such, among others, were William Cornish, Richard Edwards, and William Hunnis—all masters of the Chapel Royal—the Earl of Oxford, and Sebastian Westcote, master of the choir-boys of St. Paul's. These men were much respected as writers in their own day, frequently and enthusiastically lauded; yet today only one undoubted example of all their work survives—the *Damon and Pythias* of Edwards. It is always to our great gain when one of the many buried dramatists is raised, as Mrs. Stopes has raised Hunnis,¹ and made again a personality, more than a name. Something of this nature, though to a slight degree and in a brief space, I propose to do in this article with Westcote, a man as little known about as any, though none before 1600 had a longer or more prosperous career as producer of plays. He is indeed so little known that slight as is the biography presented in the following pages, most of the facts there included are new. My purpose in writing upon him at the present time is rather to stir up interest in him and encourage investigation, with the hope that some one may uncover facts of greater value, than to write definitively. I am the more encouraged in my attempt because I am able upon fairly solid grounds to associate his name with one extant play.

Among the various companies of children, fugitive and permanent, which played throughout England in the sixteenth century, the choir-boys of St. Paul's, London, attained a degree of importance second only to that of the Chapel Royal itself. They are first to be met with in 1552, when in February they played before the Princess Elizabeth; but the notable part of their history lies between 1558 and 1590. In that period they played almost yearly at court, and were even more in demand than the Chapel boys themselves. And the man under whom they began their career and who directed them through the most flourishing part of it

¹C. C. Stopes, *William Hunnis and the Revels of the Chapel Royal*, in Bang's *Materialen* series, 1910.

until his death in 1582, was Sebastian Westcote. In these first thirty years of their history they must have produced many plays at court and in their private house near the cathedral, most or all of which must have been written by their master, Westcote, and some of which are doubtless now extant, if we could but tell them. One cannot help feeling an interest in the early history of the company which in its last years produced the plays of Lyly, and in the man under whose direction it prospered so well.

Westcote is first met with at court, where he held in 1545 the office of one of the Yeomen of the King's Chamber. His name is given among the quarterly payments, for Christmas, a^o 37,² and from the way the item is worded³ it looks as if this were the first assignment to him in this capacity. It is significant, I think, that the future master of Paul's had his beginnings at court. It meant that he came into contact with the life of the court, with its revels and masquings and interludes, and may readily have been inspired there with a lasting interest in dramatic affairs, an interest which he turned to account as soon as he was established as almoner and master at St. Paul's. There is even the strong possibility that the children of the Chapel Royal, who had been organized into a company of actors since the early years of Henry VIII, were the direct source of inspiration. The precise date of Westcote's transfer to St. Paul's is not known, but it must clearly have been between 1545, when he was serving at court, and 1552, when he played before Elizabeth with his children. There is no evidence that the Paul's boys had ever played before the advent of Westcote, so that we must give him the credit of starting them on their histrionic career.

From his will⁴ we learn that Westcote was born in the parish of Chimley in Devon, but when we are not told. We know nothing of his life until he appears as a subordinate officer in the Royal Household; are uninformed as to how he secured the post of almoner

²Brewer and Gairdner, *Letters and Papers*, Vol. 20, pt. 2, 1035.

³"To pay this quarter and so to continue quarterly to Sebastian Wescote, at Mr. Pers' assignment."

⁴In *Somerset House, Prerogative Court of Canterbury, 14 Tirwhite*. It has never been published, but is too long and too full of unimportant details to permit of inclusion here. Most of it is taken up with legacies to various of his relatives. The only reference to the theatre at Paul's is the one item in a codicil—"To Shepard that keepeth the doore of playes—10 s."

and master of the choir-boys at St. Paul's. From 1552 until 1582 he appears with great regularity in the court account books as master of the company of players known as "the children of Paul's" and as producer of plays. In this business, or in the various businesses in which he had a hand, he made a fortune; the extent of his possessions, as made known by his will, and the liberality of his legacies show him to have died the master of what passed in those days for considerable wealth. The unusual number of his household goods was in part due to his keeping a sort of hostelry for the almonry children. Yet they were his own and not the possessions of the office, for he bequeathed them to "the use of the same Almenrye howse," in the care of the Dean and Chapter. His gifts of money, moreover, show him to have been a well-to-do man.

From his will, too, we learn that his family was a large one, though he himself seems not to have married, from there being no mention of wife or children. He names a brother George and his children; a brother William then dead; a sister-in-law Elizabeth Westcote, widow, who was doubtless the relict of William; three sons of William—Roger, Sebastian,⁵ and Francis; a brother Robert and his son Andrew; his sister Jaquet Goodmowe and four daughters; his sister's daughter—whether Jaquet's or not he does not say—and her two children; Margaret Riche, sister-in-law; and "Westcote that is blind." To all these people he leaves generous legacies; the fact of his dispersing all his possessions among them and others not his kin proves almost beyond question that he had no personal family.

From his giving small legacies to the poor of Taunton in Somerset, Kingston near Taunton, and Kyrton in Devon, just as he did to the poor of Chimley and St. Gregory's near Paul's it seems likely that he had at some time in his early life lived in these places. To his sister-in-law, Elizabeth Westcote, who seems to have been closer to him than the rest, he leaves the lease of an unidentified estate called Westgreen.

That Westcote fattened and grew rich while ruling a company of children, whether his fortune came from that source alone or not, is indeed interesting. We know, however, that his life was not all

⁵It was doubtless this Sebastian Westcote who affixed his signature to a petition for arrears of pay of certain poor knights of St. George (in *Ashmole MSS* 1111, fol. 53, Bodleian). The petition is undated, but belongs in the reign of Charles I, after the outbreak of the Civil War.

a course of smooth prosperity, uninterrupted by crosses. In fact he got into a very serious difficulty (how serious, any one will appreciate who knows the sixteenth century at all), for he was several times suspected, and apparently with good ground, of harboring popish beliefs. Strype tells⁶ that on the visitation of St. Paul's by Grindal, then bishop of London, in April, 1561, Sebastian Westcote, a vicar choral, was presented for refusing the communion, and for being suspected of popery. But the bishop had mercy, expecting his submission, until July, 1563, when he finally pronounced excommunication.⁷ Sir Robert Dudley, Earl of Leicester, at that time seemingly a patron of Westcote, wrote in his behalf to the bishop, to which the bishop replied with a long and detailed explanation, almost an apology, which is fortunately preserved in Strype.⁸ The letter is a curious document in its revelation of the bishop's character, and a valuable one for the study of Westcote. Unfortunately it, too, is too long to quote here in full. Grindal begins by referring to Dudley's letter in behalf of Westcote, then under sentence of excommunication, and then goes into a history of the case. The trouble had begun about two years before, when Westcote had been complained of for refusing the communion. He was examined, and alleged as his reasons that his conscience was not fully satisfied, "but chiefly that he was not in Charity, because of certain Actions of Debt and Suretiship between him and Sir William Garret"; of these reasons the bishop approved the first, but censured the other as "meerly Frivolous," and Sebastian was given a definite period in which to reform his conscience. But when the appointed day had come, the sinner was still recalcitrant, and so continued in spite of all exhortation; so

⁶John Strype, *Life of Grindal*, ed. 1710; pp. 59, 76-78.

⁷The note of this excommunication (the brief statement that Westcote was summoned before the Court, and on his nonappearance was pronounced "contumacem" and excommunicated) is enrolled among the records of the Consistory Court of London, in the Principal Probate Registry, in Somerset House, London. The reference is *Libri Vicarii Generalis, Huick 1561-1574*, Vol. 3, fol. 77.

⁸P. 77. The letter of Dudley to Grindal seems not to be extant; but there is preserved in *Lansdowne MSS* 6, No. 69, a letter from Grindal to Sir William Cecil, dated August 12, 1563, which refers incidentally to Dudley's letter and his own reply. "My L. Rob. wrote to me earnestly for Sebastian, to whome I haue written a longe letter moche lyke an Apologie, the copy wheroff I sende you herewith."

that he was at last pronounced excommunicate. The bishop then goes at length into the justification of his action, in which he throws doubt upon the sincerity of Westcote's religious scruples; "for now after so long Trial, and good Observation of his Proceedings herein, I begin to fear, lest his Humility in Words be a counterfeit Humility, and his Tears, Crocodile Tears, although I myself was much moved with them at the first." Perhaps the most important reason of all, from our point of view, though it is bafflingly vague, is the statement that the bishop's conscience is heavy with the false teaching which had for two or three years been poured into the ears and minds of the children entrusted to Westcote's care; "wherein, no doubt, he hath been too diligent, as hath appeared by his Fruits." What was meant by the last phrase, with its definite allegation, one would much like to know. The bishop closes his apology by granting that Westcote shall have more time to meditate—to be exact, until after the following Michaelmas—before the rigors of the law are applied.

This letter is of value not so much for its contribution to Westcote's biography, as for its commentary on his personality; although it does bring out the important fact that he had managed to put himself under the protection of the powerful Earl of Leicester—how or when we have no means of knowing. It shows, moreover, that he was not a man of little character; to stand out so long against the power of the bishop and the dignitaries of his own church argues courage and persistence of no mean sort. Indeed, I cannot help suspecting that the wording of the writ of excommunication was not in this case a mere form, and that Sebastian was fitly called contumacious and obstinate.

The intervention of the earl seems not to have availed the reculant schoolmaster, for there exists among the records kept at St. Paul's a bond⁹ dated November 8, a^o 6 Elizabeth, between Westcote and Grindal for the sum of one hundred marks, by the terms of which Westcote is required to frame his conscience to the required standard by Easter next, or if that is impossible resign his offices in St. Paul's; otherwise the bond is forfeit. Evidently Sebastian submitted to the inevitable, and like a sensible man forfeited neither his bond nor his emoluments, for he remained in the enjoyment of his offices until his death.

⁹The reference is A. Box 77/2059.

But the year 1563 did not put an end to the problem of Westcote's recusancy, and indeed there is something comic in the persistency with which he gave trouble to those officers who had in their charge the religious conscience of England. Twelve years after the conclusion of his tilt with Grindal, in 1575, he is bringing anxiety to the city fathers of London. In the *Repertories of the Court of Common Council*¹⁰ under the date December 8, a^o 18 Elizabeth, occurs the following passage:

" And also for asmoche as this Court ys enformed that one Sebastian that wyll not commvnicate with the Church of England kepe the playes and resorte of the people to great gaine and peryll of the Coruptinge of the Chyldren with papistrie And therefore master Morton ys appoynted to goe to the Deane of Powles and to gyve him notyce of that dysorder, and to praye him to gyve suche remeadye therein, within his iurysdyccion, as he shall see meete, for Christian Relygion and good order."

What became of this resolution, or of the visit of Master Morton to Dean Nowell, does not appear from any further notice in the records of the city of London. Apparently the course of Sebastian's life remained, outwardly at least, undisturbed. But it is interesting, and I believe significant of the man, that twelve years after he was to all appearances firmly anchored down to orthodoxy he was still drifting towards the abhorred papal superstitions.

Just about the time of this investigation by the city fathers, a curious accident had happened to Westcote. In 1575, not long before December, one of his boys, a player of importance, was kidnapped. This much we learn from an order of the Privy Council¹¹ directing an inquiry into the matter and an examination of suspected persons. More than that bare fact we do not know, and what the meaning and result of this affair were we have not even a means of guessing. Whether the boy was kidnapped for reasons not connected with theatrical affairs, or whether he was impressed by the Chapel Royal in defiance of the right of exemption belonging to St. Paul's, cannot be known until more illuminating information is discovered.

When I have added that Westcote died before the middle of April, 1582,¹² I have said everything there is to say about the life

¹⁰*Rep.* 19, fol. 18.

¹¹The original note of the action taken in the affair is contained in the *Privy Council Registers*, Elizabeth, Vol. II, p. 408.

¹²His will was dated April 3, 1582; proved April 14, 1582.

of this man. His name occurs often enough in contemporary documents—in a few account books at St. Paul's, in the records of payments for plays at court—but rarely in such a connection as to be informative. That is unfortunate, for if we were more liberally supplied with the circumstances of this man's life, we would undoubtedly know more than we do about the mid-Elizabethan drama. As has been said, the children were constant visitors at court during the mastership of Westcote. In the thirty years between 1552 and 1582 they played on the following occasions:

1552 (early), before the Princess Elizabeth, as already noted.

1554; a well known occasion when the boys played at Hatfield before Elizabeth and Mary.¹³

1559, August 5, when the queen was entertained by Lord Arundel at Nonsuch House.¹⁴

1560, Christmas; one interlude.¹⁵

1561, Christmas; one interlude.

1562, Shrovetide (probably) and Christmas; one play each.

1564, Christmas; two plays.

1565, Candlemas; one play.

1565, Christmas; two plays.

1565, ?; a play at the Lady Cecilia's lodgings at the Savoy.

1566, Christmas; two plays.

1567-8, Christmas-Shrovetide; two plays.¹⁶

¹³Cf. Warton, *Hist. of Poetry*, ed. 1778-81, Sec. xxiv, pp. 579-81. Murray (English Dramatic Companies, II, 286) records a seeming reference to the boys in the accounts of Hedon in Yorkshire, where is noted, with no more exactitude than that it was after Edward VI, a payment of two shillings "to the—pawlle players." That this means Westcote's company I do not at all believe. The possibility of error in transcription, the blank before the "pawlle," but more than anything the unlikelihood that this company would be found touring so far from home at so early a date in its history—all these reasons seem to me sufficient to reject the possibility of the company's being the children of Paul's.

¹⁴J. G. Nichols, *Progresses of Queen Elizabeth*, I, 74.

¹⁵The following list is compiled from M. Feuillerat's edition of the *Revels Accounts* under Elizabeth, and from the original rolls of the *Declared Accounts of the Treasurer of the Chamber*, among the records of the Pipe Office, in the Public Record Office, London; of which a convenient transcript is contained in the appendix to C. W. Wallace's *Evolution of the English Drama up to Shakespeare*, Berlin, 1913.

¹⁶The Revels books inform us that there were seven (or more probably eight) performances at this season, divided among Lord Riche's players (2 plays) and the children's companies of Westminster (1), Windsor (1), Chapel Royal (1),

- 1569, New Year's night: one play.
 1570, Innocents' Day; one play.
 1571, Innocents' Day; one play, ("Effignia," a tragedy).¹⁷
 1572-3, Twelfth Day (?);¹⁸ one play.
 1573, St. John's Night (Dec. 27); "Alkmeon."¹⁹
 1575, Candlemas Day (Feb. 2); one play.
 1576, Twelfth Night; one play.
 1577, Jan. 1; "The historie of Error."²⁰
 1577, Shrove Tuesday (Feb. 19); "The historye of Titus and Gisippus."²⁰
 1579, Jan. 1; "A Morrall of the marryage of Mynde and Measure."²¹
 1580, Jan. 3; "The history of Cipio Africanus."²²
 1581, Twelfth Night; "A storie of Pompey."²³
 1581, St. Stephen's Day (Dec. 26); a play.

This performance of St. Stephen's Day, 1581, was the last by the children of Paul's to appear on the court account books until February 27, 1587. There has been a good deal of talk about the cause of this hiatus, and as in other similar cases the hypothesis of royal inhibition has been brought forward. But that is a solution which has rarely been proved to be true, and is not to be resorted to except when everything else fails. So in this case the cessation of the Paul's boys can be explained quite simply by the illness and

and Paul's (2). The *Revels Accounts* for that year furnish the names of the plays: *As Plain as Can Be*, *The Painful Pilgrimage*, *Jack and Jill*, *Six Fools*, *Wit and Will*, *Prodigality*, "and the sevoenth of Orestes and a Tragedie of the kinge of Scottes." (Cf. *Revels Accounts*, ed. Feuillerat, p. 110). As Mrs. C. C. Stopes (*Athenacum*, 1900, I, 410) has shown, the Chapel play, which is in the *Declared Accounts* called a "tragedy," was most probably the play on the King of Scots. Then two of the remaining plays should be assigned to the Paul's boys, one of which, as I hope to prove later, was in all likelihood *Prodigality*.

¹⁷*Rev. Acc.*, p. 145.

¹⁸The day of the performance is not specified, and the warrant is dated Jan. 7.

¹⁹*Rev. Acc.*, p. 193.

²⁰*Rev. Acc.*, p. 256.

²¹*Rev. Acc.*, p. 286.

²²*Rev. Acc.*, p. 321.

²³*Rev. Acc.*, p. 336. On this performance, so the Revels books tell us, "was ymployed newe one great citty, A senate howse and eight ells of dobbble sarcenet for curtens and .xviii. paire of gloves."

death of Westcote, which took place in April of 1582 and which would have the natural effect of disrupting the organization which he had guided for so many years. The interpretation of the events that lay between the cessation and the renewal (a period still full of obscurity and doubt, complicated by the relations of the Paul's boys to the recently built playhouse in Blackfriars), is not so simple a matter; but it does not concern us, who are only occupied with the life of Westcote. With his death came to end a long period of activity, of production of plays at court and in the private theatre of which we still know nothing except that it was close by the cathedral.²⁴ A glance at the table of performances above will show how frequent were the appearances at court, incontrovertible evidence of a popularity greater than that of any other company, even the Chapel Royal. This alone is enough to make us regret our ignorance of the plays produced, and presumably written, by Westcote. But there is another circumstance to enhance our interest in the company and make our regret more keen—which is that in all likelihood the theatre at Paul's was the first regular playhouse to be constructed in London, even antedating Burbage's *Theatre*.

There are evidences to be derived from the Revels books as to the general nature of the plays from Paul's. The few titles which are cited there show us that in subject matter these plays were not different from those given by the other companies of children and indeed by the adult players. *Iphigenia*, *The History of Titus and Gisippus*, *A Moral of the Marriage of Mind and Measure*, *A Story of Pompey*—these are just the kind of titles which at this period fill the Revels books,²⁵ and may be resolved into two classes: those which suggest plays of a romantic cast derived from classical sources or the great romances of the Middle Ages, and those which suggest interludes of a moral and instructive nature, like the *Marriage of Mind and Measure*. The writers for the children's companies, being usually men of culture if not University graduates,

²⁴Nothing that the writer has attempted in his searchings into the history of the children of Paul's has proved so baffling as the identification of this theatre. The evidence on the matter is slight, and confuses rather than illuminates. On the whole, it seems likely that the most persistent theory—that the choir-boys' singing-school (that is to say, the Almonry house) was the place—is the correct one.

²⁵For a convenient listing of titles from the *Revels Accounts* see C. W. Wallace's *Evolution of the English Drama up to Shakespeare*, pp. 199 ff.

had a taste for classical subjects, which they treated as freely as they pleased, as freely as did Edwards in his *Damon and Pithias*, or Udall in *Ralph Roister Doister*. Otherwise there was no great difference, observable from the titles, at this time between plays for children and plays for men. To the classical plays named in the Revels books is to be added a play of *Cupid and Psyche*, which Gosson tells us was being acted at Paul's about 1581.²⁶

To these general and all too insufficient facts I should be delighted to think that I could add something of far more importance—the identification of one of these performances noted in the *Revels Accounts* with a play now extant. This I feel I am able to do, though on what good evidence the reader must judge for himself. The bits of circumstantial evidence which relate one of the many anonymous plays which go to fill our editions of old drama to certain performances of the Paul's boys, are just strong enough to accept or slight enough to reject, according to the mood of the judge. To me they seem sufficient; and in truth they are better than much evidence upon which firm conclusions of this nature have been made.

The play which I presume to call Westcote's—for if it was produced at Paul's it was probably written by the master of the boys—is to be found in Vol. 8 of Hazlitt's *Dodsley*, and is known as *The Contention between Liberality and Prodigality*.²⁷ As its name suggests, it is a moral interlude of the kind so prolific in the mid-sixteenth century. It was printed in 1602, but I have not been able to find that it was ever entered in the Stationers' Register. Near the end of the play (p. 380 in *Dodsley*) we are given the date Feb. 4, 1601,²⁸ that being the day when, it is charged, the crimes of Prodigality were committed. It is reasonable to suppose that this was the date of performance at court.

²⁶"But in Playes either those thinges are fained that neuer were, as Cupid and Psyche plaid at Paules"; Stephen Gosson, *Playes Confuted in fūe Actions*.

²⁷"A Pleasant Comedie, showing the contention betweene Liberalitie and Prodigalitie. As it was playd before her Maiestie. London Printed by Simon Stafford for George Vincent, and are to be sold at the signe of the Hand in Wood-street over against S. Michaels Church. 1602." 4°.

²⁸The Clerk says: "Thou art indicted here by the name of Prodigality,
For that thou, the fourth day of February,
In the three and forty year of the prosperous reign
Of Elizabeth, our dread sovereign," etc.

Very little has been said about this play, and that little has been none too intelligent. The introductory note in Hazlitt's *Dodsley* is worse than incompetent. It repeats Collier's error²⁹ of dating the play 1600, and it interprets a reference in the Prologue to "childish years" as meaning that the author was a youth. The lines are these:

"As for the quirks of sage Philosophy
Or points of squiriliting scurrility
The one we shun, for childish years too rare,
Th'other unfit for such as present are."

The natural understanding of these lines is that the play was being performed by boys, who were too young to engage in plays of a deeply philosophical cast. Certainly young authors are not accustomed to refer to themselves as children. The editor further calls attention to the fact that in 1567-8 a play called "Prodigality" was acted at court.

Mr. Fleay was more observant. He rightly interprets³⁰ that the play was given by children, but assigns it to the Chapel Royal, for no good reason. He believes that it was written in the reign of Edward VI, from the fact that in two scenes, (III, 5, V, 4) the word "prince" remains, whereas in the same scenes and elsewhere "queen" is used; and this discrepancy he explains on the grounds of careless revision. Of all the errors in his books there is none more characteristic than this. True it is that in more than one interlude there are clear evidences that "king" or "prince" has been changed to "queen" to the violation of rhyme, and in some cases has been left in by neglect. But in this play "prince" is used in its general, sexless sense of "sovereign," and is interchangeable with "queen." We might grant that in the lines

"Sir, I beseech you, speak a good word for me to the prince
That by her letters I may be commended to some province,"³¹

the reviser had overlooked "prince" while changing "him" to "her," though that strains credulity. But when we are asked in regard to the phrase "the prince herself" on the next page to suppose that the same thing was done, we must flatly refuse to allow anything so absurd. There is no evidence, then, of the play's being older than the reign of Elizabeth. Fleay admits that it may be a revised version of the old lost *Prodigality*.

²⁹*Hist. Eng. Dram. Poetry*, ed. 1879, I, 308.

³⁰*Biog. Chronicle of the Eng. Drama*, II, 323.

³¹Hazlitt's *Dodsley*, VIII, 356.

This is all that has been written about the play. Let us approach it anew and see what we can make of it. In the first place, I am firmly in agreement with Fleay that it is a children's play. The lines of the prologue clearly point to that conclusion, and cannot be interpreted in any other way without twisting them to the meaning. The play, moreover, is full of songs, and while that would be dubious evidence alone, it offers some corroboration. Certainly the play was given in 1601, and very probably on the day mentioned in it, or shortly after. In its general character it certainly suggests a much earlier date than 1601. It is of that kind of mixed morality and interlude which is represented in its perfection by *The Nice Wanton* and which was popular between 1550 and 1580.

As we look back through the years for an earlier appearance of the play, we are first of all drawn to the mysterious *Prodigality* which was presented at court in Christmas or Shrovetide of 1567-8. As we have already³² seen, there were eight plays given in this period; and of the corresponding performances seven are specified in the *Declared Accounts of the Treasurer of the Chamber* in this manner; Lord Riche's men (two plays), the Westminster boys (one play), the children of Paul's under Westcote (two plays), all at Christmas; and the boys of the Chapel Royal under Hunnis (one play, a tragedy) and of Windsor under Farrant (one play) at Shrovetide. The Chapel play has been identified with the "Tragedie of the kinge of Scottes," listed in the Revels books. The only other company which was playing then and also when the *Contention* was revived in 1601 was Paul's. We have, then, a strong inference that, providing *Prodigality* and the *Contention* were the same, it was the Paul's boys who gave them both; for it is more likely that a play would be revived in 1601 from the old repertory of the company than from the repertory of another.

We come upon more suggestive hints in the accounts of the revels at court for Christmas, Twelfthtide, Candlemas, and Shrovetide of 1574-5.³³ At this season the performances were thus distributed: the Earl of Leicester's men on St. Stephen's and New Year's days; Lord Clinton's men on St. John's day and Jan. 2; the children of Windsor on Twelfth Night; the Chapel boys on Shrove Sunday; the Merchant Tailors' boys and the Earl of Warwick's men in Shrovetide; and Paul's boys on Candlemas day

³²See *ante*, p. 574 and note 16.

³³Ed. Feuillerat, pp. 234 ff.

(Feb.2)³⁴ It was a busy season for plays, and the *Revels Accounts* are full of references to properties. The most significant of them all for our purposes is this one:

"The fethermaker A Cote, a hatt, & Buskins all ouer covered with ffethers of cvllers for vanytie in sebastians playe with xij^d geven in Reward to y^e bringer—xxij.⁵¹"³⁵

If we turn now to the *Contention*, we find that the very first stage direction reads: "Enter *Vanity* solus, all in feathers." The coincidence is significant, and I cannot recollect any other play in which *Vanity*, in a cloak of feathers, is a participant.

The only other direct reference to the Paul's play neither helps nor hinders our theory. It is this:

"skynnes to furr the hoode (*Vanity's*, in all likelihood) in sebastians playe—ij.⁵

ffor making of ij sarcenet hooddes for Cyttzyens in the same playe—ij.⁵¹"³⁶

There are citizens in the *Contention*, but so doubtless were there in many other plays. But there is one item which, though unconnected with any company, is yet full of significance under these circumstances:

"A ffelt y^t was covered with mony—vj.^d"³⁷

Among the *dramatis personae* of the *Contention*, and a very important member, is Money, son to Dame Fortune. The "felt covered with money" may well have been a part of his costume, in the fashion which then obtained of characterizing figures in moralities by their dress. There is no other item not definitely connected with one of the other companies which can be applied to the *Contention*, unless it be this:

"Cownters to cast awaye by the players—iiij.⁵¹"

There is much talk in the *Contention* of money and the squandering of it, and very possibly the distribution or flinging away of coins played a part.

That is the sum total of our evidences; no one of them by itself is strong, but taken together they form a pretty firm chain. Let us recapitulate.

³⁴*Declared Accounts*; cf. Wallace, *Evolution*, p. 216.

³⁵*Revels Accounts*, p. 214.

³⁶*Revels Accounts*, p. 244.

³⁷*Revels Accounts*, p. 244.

In 1601 a play of an antiquated type is produced in London, with evidences in it that it was originally written in the early part of Elizabeth's reign. From the Prologue we learn that it is a children's play. Hence it must have been given either by Paul's boys or the Chapel Royal, for they were the only children then acting in London. The main characters are Vanity, Prodigality, Tenacity, Fortune, Master Money, Liberality, and there are various minor characters of real life—the Host, Tom Toss, Dick Dicer, Captain Well-Done, constables, sheriff, clerk, judge, crier, etc. In Christmas of 1567-8 was produced a play called by the short title "Prodigality." At that time four companies of boys played at court—Paul's, Chapel, Westminster, and Windsor; of these, the Chapel, the only company besides Paul's which was playing again in 1601, was presenting a tragedy of the "King of Scots." In 1574-5 the Paul's boys were again playing at court, along with many other companies. There are no direct evidences in the Revels books as to the name of the play, but among the notes of properties are references to Vanity and her feathers, to some article of dress covered with money, to counters (presumably make-believe coins) to be thrown away—all of which fit excellently into the *Contention*. For these reasons I believe that in 1567-8 the Paul's boys presented at court a moral-interlude of *Prodigality*, or *Liberality and Prodigality*, which was revived in 1574-5, and again under the title of *The Contention between Liberality and Prodigality* in 1601. The conditions under which the Paul's boys began to act in 1599-1600 favor this hypothesis, for it is known that they first put on "musty" and stale plays from their earlier repertory, which did not please the public and were soon withdrawn.³⁸ It has been supposed that the *Wisdom of Dr. Doddipole* and *Maid's Metamorphosis* were two such plays, and that may be so; I feel that the *Contention* was a third.

We have no record of a performance at court by the Paul's boys (or by the Chapel either) on Feb. 4, 1601; Paul's did play on Jan. 1. But that is by no means final evidence that they may not have played on the later date. Nor are we certain that Feb. 4, the date in the play, was the date of the performance.

³⁸Cf. the oft-quoted lines in *Jack Drum's Entertainment*, Act V, lines 111 ff.

"But they (the boys of Paul's) produce,
Such mustie fopperies of antiquity,
And do not sute the humorous ages backs
With clothes in fashion."

Because of the many vicissitudes the play has endured in the way of revivals, the question as to what relation the *Contention* bears to the original, or even to the play as Westcote left it, is very difficult to decide. On that account we are treading unstable ground when we undertake to point out Westcote's abilities as a dramatist. For the sake of clearness, a brief résumé will help our discussion.

The play opens, after the prologue, with a soliloquy by Vanity which tells us that a state of enmity exists between Fortune and Virtue. In the second scene, a vigorous piece of writing, Prodigality arrives at an inn and rouses the Host. Virtue and Equity bewail the state of the human race. Then follows a scene between Tenacity, who in spite of his name is a realistic countryman of thick wits and an equally thick dialect, and Vanity, who is a kind of Vice. Tenacity is in search of Money, and is persuaded that he is to be found by courting Vanity. Enters then Money, singing, and heralding Fortune, who comes close upon his heels in the midst of another song. With Fortune's declaration that she has come to humble virtue and prove her own supremacy, the act closes. Act II opens with a soliloquy by Liberality, Virtue's steward and a foil both to Prodigality and Tenacity. These last two seek Vanity's intercession with Fortune to procure them Money. Fortune awards him to Prodigality. Act III is taken up with the schemes of Tom Toss, Dick Dicer, and Dandaline, the hostess, to fleece Prodigality, and with two suits to Liberality for preferment by Captain Well-Done and a courtier, in which Liberality's judgment and integrity are shown in befriending the one and refusing the other. In Act IV Money, escaped from Prodigality by the help of Dicer and Toss, is taken on by Tenacity. Prodigality, in desperation at the loss of Money, attempts to scale Fortune's castle and enter the window by main force, but is repulsed and narrowly escapes death. In Act V Prodigality with his boon companions is seen making up with Money, having waylaid and killed Tenacity. The constables raise the hue and cry and finally capture the thieves. Prodigality is at first sentenced to die, but on his earnest protestations of repentance the sentence is left open to the Queen's decision. The act is filled out with further dialogues between Virtue and Equity, the fortunate conclusion of Captain Well-Done's suit, the bestowal of Money upon Liberality, with whom at last he has chances of good treatment, and the final exaltation of Virtue over Fortune.

There are three threads in the plot: the adventures of Prodigality with Tenacity, Money, Vanity, Fortune, Tom Toss, and Dick Dicer; the befriending of Captain Well-Done by Liberality; and the contention, never actually carried out, but always suggested, between Virtue and Fortune. The threads are no more than slightly related. Of them all, by far the most dramatic, vivid, and amusing is that which concerns Prodigality, Tenacity, and Money. Their scenes, which take up the bulk of the play, are written with flavor, dash, and compactness; there is plenty of action, and the speech is unusually clean. Tenacity, as I have said, is a thickwitted country lout, with a dialect full of v's and ch's, like that which was so popular in comedies at the time when the play was written—the dialect of Grim in *Damon and Pithias*. Here is a sample—Tenacity's reply to Vanity, inquiring whither he is bound (II, 4):

“Nay, bur lady, zon ich can make no haste,
Vor che may say to thee, cham tired clean.”

This dialect of Tenacity's raises in itself the presumption that the play was written close to the time of such plays as *Like Will to Like*, *Gammer Gurton's Needle*, *Damon and Pithias*, and others which had one or more dialect characters of this type. There seems to have been a fashion in such personages between 1560 and 1580.

As I have said, since we cannot tell how much alteration the play has undergone in the vicissitudes of years, we are at a loss as to just how much credit we ought to give Westcote for his work herein. Beyond question, I think, the moralizing passages which engage Virtue, Equity, and Liberality come from the older play, but what of the remaining scenes of real life? Are they the additions of a later age? I do not believe they were entirely so, for that would mean that the old play was cut to pieces, and a new play could have been quite as easily written. Then, too, the popularity of the play surely depended upon these realistic scenes; they must have been in the original in some form, or else we are puzzled to account for the revivals of the play. As they stand now, these scenes have a continuity of treatment and theme which defies the efforts of the investigator to find any differences in the manner of handling them. Of course, the old scenes may have been pruned and polished to some extent, but I see no reason to think that revision went further than this. The character of Money comes beyond doubt from the original play, and reflects a dramatic fad of the times. We are pretty safe in taking him as an example of Westcote's best work, and that is really good.

If this play is now in substantially the same condition as Westcote left it, it shows that he quite deserved the reputation to which his long and unbroken popularity at court testifies. He was not a poet of more than ordinary ability, even for his own time, but he could write a scene of popular life in a crisp, compact, humorous, and telling manner. The play is certainly not so good as *The Nice Wanton*, which is written in a somewhat similar way, but it is a great deal more alive and interesting than many of the dull interludes of the time.

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